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NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW.

No. CCCCI.

APRIL, 1890.

DISCIPLINE IN THE NAVY.

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"ORDER is Heaven's first law," and it is a law that governs all classes of society. It arises from the mental and moral training which one receives in early days—the foundation of manners, including the comprehension of knowledge which may enable one to enter into competition with others for the prizes which fall to those who can stand the rules of military or any other discipline.

When a boy starts in life to pursue any career, he should examine himself carefully to ascertain if he is mentally and physically qualified to contend with the discipline he will be called upon to face, for in every occupation, great or small, discipline is likely to be the stumbling-block of the youthful adventurer.

Discipline, in plain English, means "to train, form, educate, instruct, drill, or regulate," either by one's self or by another. More especially is it applied to the military and naval professions, where to the tyro the regulations may appear extremely arbitrary, although to the instructed those very rules are the life of the service. Many persons have an idea that naval and military regulations, by which armies and ships are brought to such a state of perfection, are something terrible; but, compared with ecclesiastical discipline, they are really quite moderate.

There is no business in life that can be successfully carried on without discipline, which must be sufficiently strict to keep every man, woman, and child at their work; and sometimes the overseers are so tyrannical that they far exceed the limits which would be allowed on board a vessel of war.

There have doubtless been cases in the navy where officers have exceeded their authority and have failed to master the first principle of discipline,—viz., to control their temper,—but my own experience teaches me that commanding officers have oftener shut their eyes to breaches of discipline than looked around in order to punish them.

This article properly concerns the discipline of the United States navy; but our navy is so small and of so little importance, compared with those of the other great powers, that it hardly affords a field for a display of ability in bringing the discipline to a high standard. It is an interesting circumstance that in 1799 we had a larger navy afloat than we have to-day—thirty-three vessels carrying more than eight hundred guns, commanded by glorious old Commodore Truxtun, who taught the French that they could not with impunity violate our neutrality.

We may open our eyes very wide as the enterprising news-gatherer publishes to the world the "barbarities" committed in the navy, but there is no comparison between naval discipline to-day and the iron system of 1798: they are as opposite as summer is from winter. When Truxtun arrived in the West Indies, the British, who had a large fleet in that quarter, were greatly astonished at the facility with which the Americans adopted the discipline of the Royal Navy and led them in many things which tended to make the squadron more efficient. At that time, as at present, Great Britain had the largest and best-disciplined navy afloat, and this preëminence she will doubtless continue to maintain while her fleets are regulated by a purely naval administration. The English inherited their naval training from the Vikings of old, who from the frozen north laid desolate the coasts of Europe, and even carried their victorious arms throughout the Mediterranean.

After William the Conqueror became master of England, the island gradually increased in maritime importance and established British influence the world over, and from Great Britain we have inherited the regulations which have made her preëminent as a naval power. From Great Britain, also, we inherited all our naval attributes, and had our navy progressed as has that of the mother-country, in proportion to our population and wealth, we would at present be one of the greatest of naval powers, with a discipline that would enable us to carry out any enterprise we might undertake.

But the United States have never been a great naval power.

Our efforts in that direction have been sporadic, and what one administration might undertake to establish another would set aside for something diametrically opposite; so that in the course of years the so-called navy of the United States has undergone more changes in organization, discipline, etc., than any other service in the world.

The first positive regulations for the government of our navy were prepared by the Board of Navy Commissioners in 1815, just after the close of the war with Great Britain. Up to that time we had been copying the British regulations, every commanding officer adding to his general order-book as seemed to him most desirable. The Board of Commissioners adopted the British system with some modifications, and our discipline became much like that of the English. It was rather severe, it is true, and smacked somewhat of the Vikings and buccaneers; but it was a delight in the days of my youth, and for many years afterwards, to visit an American man-of-war and see the cleanliness, comfort, and discipline that pervaded the ship. For aught I know, the discipline may be better to-day, but things do not seem to work so smoothly as of yore, and the results do not correspond to the time and trouble expended.

Of late years I have been struck with the avidity with which the press has sought opportunities to censure the navy for its shortcomings. The service does not receive a fair representation for any mistakes made by its officers. If one man commits an error, that is no reason why the whole service should be condemned. Nothing tends so much to break down discipline as furious onslaughts on an officer who has made himself liable to the ordeal of a court martial. Even the meanest culprit in civil life is seldom prejudged by the press; and an officer in the navy should at least have an equal chance with a prisoner in the Tombs, and receive a fair hearing before being condemned by public opinion.

The discipline of our navy is at present very mild,—patriarchal, in fact,—although it is within the power of a commanding officer to make it unpleasant for an insubordinate officer or man. If anything, the tendency in the service is towards what has been called "mollycoddling"—that is, a commanding officer is so anxious to finish his cruise with satisfaction to all hands and the Navy Department that he grants his men more indulgences than are required for their health and comfort. Leniency as well as

severity may be carried too far, and although the commanding officer of a ship is disposed to be very mild, he should see that discipline is not neglected.

On my first acquaintance with the navy, in 1823, there was but one kind of punishment for the men in vogue on shipboard. That was by the use of the cat-o'-nine-tails, a relic of barbarism handed down from the time of good Queen Bess, who prided herself on the navy which repulsed the "Invincible Armada" of ten times its own strength. Under the discipline of early times, of which the press-gang and the "cats" were such potent factors, the British navy captured or destroyed nearly everything opposed to it. Whipping was considered the best means of disciplining a crew, whereas, in fact, it made mere brutes of the sailors, who in those days had perhaps scarcely sentiment enough in them to appreciate the degradation to which they were subjected. However, the most remarkable circumstances of all is that in the early days of the United States navy this barbarous custom should have taken such deep root, and that the people of this country should so long have tolerated a practice so disgraceful.

It is true that the discipline of our navy was of the best kind as far as having duty carried on to suit the commanding officer of a vessel was concerned, and when the "cat" disappeared from the service in 1850, not many years before the spirit ration was abolished, it stood on a new footing altogether. Some of the wisest old sea-dogs declared that the navy was ruined, and, with the abolition of flogging and the stoppage of grog, could not hope to escape *sheol*. It is strange, but true, that many old seamen who were partial to the service for the sake of the grog, which they received three times a day, were equally opposed to the abolition of the "cat." The "cat," they argued, was a wholesome terror to worthless loafers about decks, and the only means of making them do their duty. As for the grog, it is well known that St. Paul recommended a little wine for the stomach's sake.

These two events, so important to the moral improvement of the navy, had the strange effect of driving some of the best seamen from the service, which would seem to indicate that their love for the navy was not equal to their fondness for grog. It was remarked by one of the best officers of the navy, who afterwards held a high position in the Confederate service, that, should the "cat" be thrown overboard and grog abolished, the navy would

never be able to maintain proper discipline ; but those in favor of the new departure had the satisfaction of seeing the naval service regenerated, the sailors working the ships and fighting the guns in a manner never excelled, while law and order, without which a ship is but a floating hell, were fully maintained.

If to-day any one were to propose to reintroduce flogging and the spirit ration into the navy, he would be ridiculed by everybody. It is true that in olden times ship's crews worked in a livelier way, as a rule, than they do at present; but the service has advanced so far on the road to moral reform, and the condition of affairs generally is so much improved, that it would seem better to adhere to the Roman maxim, "*Festina lente*," than to try for such great speed in everything, to the detriment of comfort and the moral attributes which should distinguish an American vessel of war.

No one can anticipate the ordeal through which he must pass during a three-years' cruise in a ship, say, like the "Chicago," of 4,500 tons' displacement, and with about 400 officers and men. The commanding officer of such a ship has a great responsibility on his shoulders. He finds himself face to face with all the different elements in the naval service, and is contemplated with the deepest interest by all on board, who wonder how much comfort they are to have during the cruise with their prospective commander. The captain, meanwhile, feels isolated from the rest of the world, uncertain if he has a friend in all the throng that clusters at the gangway to witness his coming on board. Perhaps he does not know a single officer in the ship, and it is probable that he never before laid eyes on any of his crew ; still he is expected by the government to take that vessel around the world, starting with everything in confusion, and bring her back after a three-years' cruise with all in perfect condition and the ship's company satisfied with their treatment.

To comply with these conditions, an officer must have dignity of character and temper under perfect control, be familiar with the regulations of the navy, be a good judge of character, and able to discriminate in regard to the numerous questions that are constantly raised for his decision. He has four hundred pairs of eyes ever on the watch, and his transgressions, great or small, will be noted and used against him, should opportunity offer. The commanding officer is alone responsible to the Navy Department for any inefficiency in the ship, and he has not always the means of

making her efficient without enforcing some regulation which may affect the convenience of those on board.

There are elements in a vessel of war that cannot always be kept at rest. In some cases these elements pull in different directions. Then indeed is the captain a subject for pity, since he must reconcile all differences that occur.

When a ship returns from a cruise, the Board of Inspection and Survey, which comes under my supervision, has to ascertain if the vessel is in all respects ready for any duty that may be required of her; if she is clean and in order, and her crew proficient in gun and sail drill; if every department of the ship is in perfect condition,—in short, if the regulations of the navy have been complied with. Frequently the board will append to their report a recommendation like the following: "The board are of opinion that it would be appropriate for the Navy Department to issue a letter of approval to the captain, officers, and crew for the fine condition in which the ship has been brought home."

This is saying a good deal for the discipline of the service, considering that in no other navy is there such a cosmopolitan set of sailors. They represent all the nations of the earth, with a large proportion of the descendants of the Vikings of the north. Such are the elements that our naval officers have to drill into shape to defend the honor of the flag, and it may be truly affirmed that the United States navy is manned by foreigners. The task of an officer is, then, a hard one—to drill a crew many of whom do not understand the English language.

By a report of the Board of Inspection and Survey I was made aware that when the "Trenton" sailed for the Pacific she had, out of the four hundred persons on board, but eighty who could speak English, and that most of the crew were Scandinavians who had never before served in our navy. Still they were a fine set of men, capable of performing any duty. How well the officers fulfilled the task of drilling this crew of aliens in a short time was illustrated in the harbor of Apia, at the Samoan Islands, when the "Trenton" and other vessels were destroyed in that awful gale.

None who experienced those hours of uncertainty can ever forget them, and those who appreciate our navy will ever remember the discipline exhibited in the three American vessels throughout that hurricane, which placed all the ships in the harbor either upon the bottom or upon the beach. On the

bridge of the "Trenton" stood the intrepid Rear-Admiral Kimberly, who fought under Farragut at Port Hudson, Grand Gulf, and Mobile Bay as first lieutenant of the "Hartford," coolly watching every phase of the storm, and prepared to take advantage of any chance to save the ship and crew; Captain Farquhar, whose discipline was of the firmest, but mildest, form, and who had taught in a few months his heterogeneous crew to move like a single man, with Lieutenant Brown, the navigator, at his side aiding and supporting him,—all as calm as if on parade. The eye of every one in the ship was upon them, and all were inspired by their example. During the storm there was no confusion in any of the ships; all was conducted in the most seamanlike manner; and, though the United States lost three vessels, the record made by the navy at Apia will ever stand as a monument to discipline.

When the "Vandalia" went to the bottom, the commander-in-chief, thinking to elevate the spirits of the "Trenton's" crew, ran up the American ensign, which was almost immediately blown to ribbons. Yet the brave officers and sailors paid due tribute to the flag under which they were serving, and gave three hearty cheers, which were heard above the roar of the elements. This was a touching event, but not more so than one which followed. When the storm was at its height, the band of the flagship was directed to play "The Star-Spangled Banner." Then came "Home, Sweet Home," the sound of the music carrying inspiration to the ears of those grappling with death.

The "Vandalia" was upon the bottom, her officers and men in the rigging, the captain washed overboard and drowned; the "Nipsic" was thrown upon the beach by the fury of the storm, where it was thought she would go to pieces and all her crew perish; the "Trenton" was lying at single anchor, her other chains having parted, with her fires extinguished, within twenty feet of an angry reef over which the whole ocean seemed to be pouring, while the only thing which saved the vessel was the undertow which kept her up to her anchor. Meanwhile the officers never faltered; they seemed to scorn the elements that were urging them to destruction.

While in this deplorable situation, the British frigate "Calliope," finding that she could not hold to her anchors, slipped her cables and put to sea under steam. Such was the fury of the blast that for a time the ship did not seem to move. Again the

"Trenton's" crew manned the rigging and gave three hearty cheers, to which the "Calliope's" crew immediately responded. The British ship seemed inspired with new life and crept out to sea, the only vessel that escaped unscathed.

In the whole course of my naval experience I have never known a case of more perfect discipline than was exhibited on board the "Trenton," and the officers who saved her for so long a time from going on the reefs may congratulate themselves on being identified with so glorious an event and on having added laurels to the American navy. No greater exhibition of courage, seamanship, and discipline has ever been chronicled, and even if we did lose the best part of that little navy which has vigorously struggled for so many years for a trifling expansion, it went to the bottom, torn by the coral reefs of Apia, with a halo of glory which will never be dimmed.

I think I may justly say that the same courage and discipline which were exhibited in the squadron under Rear-Admiral Kimberly would be shown in almost every vessel of the service if placed in the same situation. The same spirit animates the breasts of the officers of the navy. There may be exceptions, but they are few and far between. I have been identified with the navy for sixty-six years, and have seldom known a case where there was a want of discipline, bravery, and seamanship in time of danger.

During the war I had under my command three hundred and seventy-five vessels and some 50,000 men and officers, and do not remember a case of cruelty and injustice from officers to seamen. The discipline was mild. Hundreds of offences were condoned because there was not time in those stern days to be wasted in courts-martial for cases that could be dealt with in a milder way without violating the law.

There may be sometimes too much law and not enough justice. It is not the severity, but the certainty, of punishment that deters men from committing offences. Except for crimes, the punishments on board ship should approximate in a manner to those used in private families. As much can be obtained from a child by setting it upon a chair and letting it cry itself out as by bruising its flesh; and in military courts the officers would do themselves more honor by leaning towards humanity than by enforcing the most rigorous punishments and gaining the name of martinets.

Errors in the proceedings of naval general courts-martial are

possible, and there is stringency in them which perhaps might be abated; but the revising power has authority to modify sentences, and as the matter comes before the Judge-Advocate-General and the Secretary of the Navy, it is to be supposed that these gentlemen will view all cases without prejudice. Should there be too much rigor in the sentence of a sailor, it is not the fault of the naval officer if it is carried into execution.

The navy of the United States lies under one great disadvantage in regard to manning its ships: that is the lack of a reserve to draw upon for seamen; and the only Americanism which exists among the crews in the service is that little leaven of 750 boys who are under instruction at the Newport training station, together with the training vessels which obtain their crews yearly from these embryo seamen. This is a system which is highly prized by the navy.

The policy of this country has always been opposed to the establishment of large military organizations, on the ground that they are antagonistic to our system of government. The absurdity of this proposition could be easily demonstrated. On what principle the people of the United States have allowed their mercantile marine to go to decay, no one can tell. It is owing to the loss of our merchant vessels and the fact that the American flag is seldom seen abroad that we have so much difficulty in manning our navy with Americans. If we could have a pure American crew on board each ship in the service, there would be little or no severity required in maintaining discipline; for as regards moral character, steadiness, obedience to regulations, and a love for the ocean, American seamen are unequalled by any afloat; but they ship in small numbers, not liking to be crowded with foreigners—people with whom they have few associations.

On the introduction of steam vessels and the establishment of ocean lines the magnificent fleets of American sailing vessels, which carried passengers and freight to Europe, were broken up. Their commanders, officers, and crews were quite equal to anything we had in the navy, and in regard to carrying sail and making quick passages they were ahead of the majority of old naval officers who were brought up to take a reef in the topsails at sundown. The discontinuance of the lines of packets was a great loss to the navy, for they provided the service with petty officers and leading men of American birth, the finest seamen in

the world. These men gave a patriotic tone to a ship's company; and woe to the foreigner who should curse the American flag or indulge in mutinous language on shipboard.

Every now and then certain persons, aided by assiduous reporters, make an attack upon the marine corps of the navy, insisting that the marines take up too much room on board ship, and are no longer useful. I fall back again on my sixty-six years' experience, and state, without fear of contradiction, that our marine corps is the finest body of men in any navy, and that to abolish it would strike a fatal blow at the discipline of the navy.

The character of the sailor has not been brought to such perfection that the military power on which the captain of a ship depends to put down insubordination and mutiny can be dispensed with. There could be no mutiny on board one of our ships of war that the marines could not put down. They are a most important part of the working power of a vessel, handling the great guns, small arms, and yards of the ship when not actually employed in police service.

It would be very hard to convince the majority of naval officers that the marine corps—I might say the right arm of the navy—should be dispensed with. If the corps was doubled, it would be one of the best additions that could be made to the navy.

The limits prescribed to my article do not give much opportunity to particularize on the subject of discipline. I beg leave, however, to state that the sailors of the United States navy are better paid, fed, and clothed than those of any other navy in the world. The average farmer does not sit down to as good meals as do our sailors every day of their lives. The sailors in no other navy are treated with such consideration and receive such indulgences as ours. Instead of being obliged to let their pay accumulate, as was the custom in olden times, until the ship was paid off, they are allowed a portion of their wages monthly, provided their conduct has been good, and they have merited the indulgence of visiting the shore.

On the whole, I believe the discipline of the navy may be safely intrusted to the hands of its officers, who have shown themselves faithful observers of the law, and who are more interested in having order maintained, and proper naval discipline kept up, than any one else.

DAVID D. PORTER.